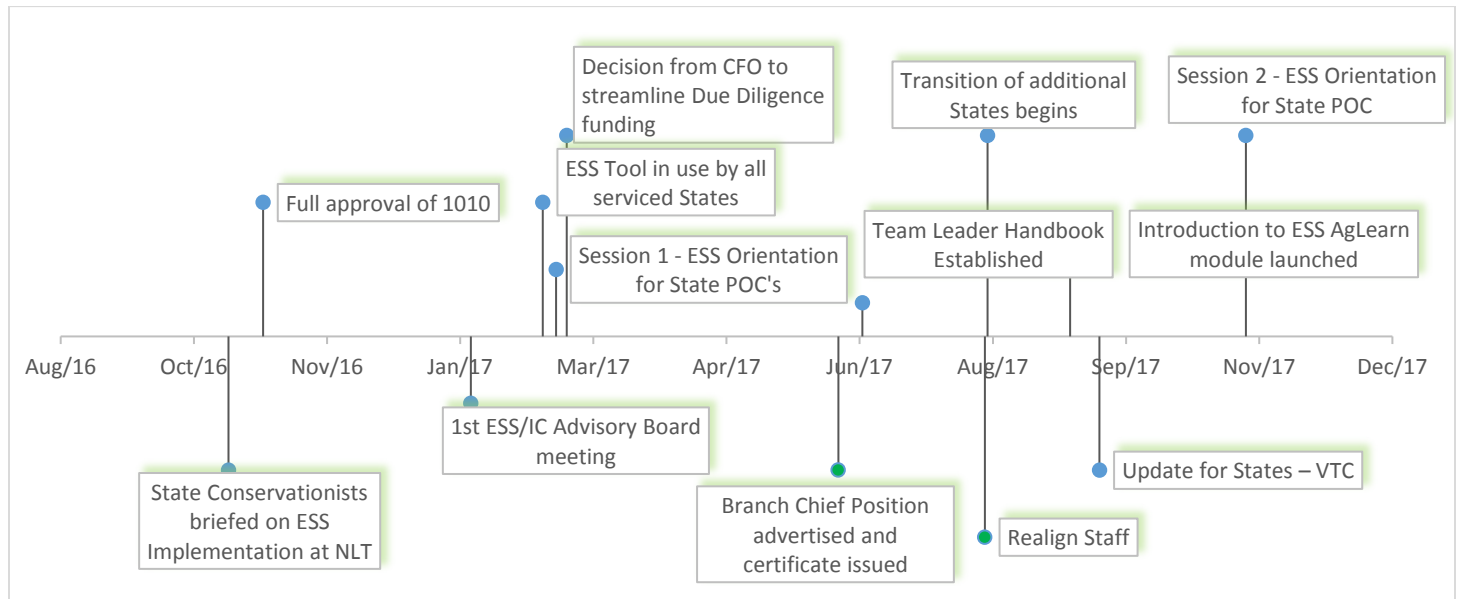


Easement Support Services (ESS) Implementation Plan Executive Summary

ESS Implementation Milestones:



Communications

- As ESS implementation continues following the guiding principles below, updates will be provided to State Conservationists (STCs), Assistant STCs, easement program staff, national service delivery branches, Office of the General Counsel (OGC), and partners through existing standing meetings such as the Chief's VTC, EPD net conferences, and partner agreements for informational Web conferences.
- States were briefed on the ESS implementation plan during the October 2016 National Leadership Team meeting. Topics included an overview of what ESS will look like including the transition process and procedures, State and ESS roles, and how to plan for ESS.
- EPD will continue to post new and updated information on the EPD/ESS Information SharePoint site.

HR Actions

- EPD continues to work with Deputy Chief for Programs and the Regional Conservationists to ensure priority positions are filled given current budget and hiring constraints.
- The ESS Branch chief (GS-15) has been approved for hiring and the position has been advertised and a certificate issued.
- When possible, staffing of the ESS Branch will be done in priority order and with as many advertised positions bundled as possible.
- Actions to realign/reassign staff have been initiated with HR and the RC's office.



V5 July, 2017

Guiding Principles:

- **Teams of experts**
- **Service to a State only when ESS Team is fully functional**
- **Phased State-specific transitions to receiving service**
- **Adjustments/updates welcome**

Contract and Agreement Support

- Currently one contract is being utilized for administrative support for the ESS Branch.
- As dictated by workload and ESS Branch staffing, additional contract services and partner agreements may be utilized.

Training and Certification

- Key to the ESS model is having adequately trained staff, both on the ESS Teams and in the States – standard training plans have been developed as well as “on-demand” training modules.
- EPD is coordinating with NEDC to develop permanent AgLearn training modules that will be targeted and accessible to various staff levels.
 - ESS orientation for State POC’s was the first National Employee Development Center (NEDC) course launched in February of 2017 in Richmond, VA. All eight States currently receiving services attended.
 - Introduction to ESS will be an AgLearn module that will be available to all NRCS staff and at a minimum will be required for anyone on the ESS Team or receiving ESS Services.
- ESS Team members will be certified by completing required training that is documented in individual training plans.

Roles and Responsibilities

- State Conservationists will continue to retain all currently delegated authorities related to easement programs.
- States will continue to manage easement program funding and make project selections.
- ESS Teams are specialists supporting States on easement acquisitions.
- ESS Teams assist the State by leading the interactions with mission support services branches for the administrative and financial components of easement acquisitions and with OGC for title opinions.

Standard Operating Procedures

- The ESS Branch will function utilizing *standard operating procedures* (SOPs) that are available to States.
- *ESS Orientation Handbook* provides a complete listing of roles and responsibilities, procedures, communications, and resources.

Policy, Performance, and System Adjustments

- Program policy has been adjusted to incorporate ESS processes and responsibilities.
- Mission support services branch customer guides and handbooks should be updated to incorporate ESS as the primary customer for several easement acquisition touch points.
- State Conservationist and ESS Branch staff performance measures for easement acquisition activities will be adjusted and established.
- NEST will be updated to the level possible to incorporate ESS processes.
- CDSI business rules and planning has and will continue to consider ESS processes.



V5 July, 2017

Phased ESS Service Schedule

- Currently serviced States (Alaska, California, Illinois, Ohio, Pacific Islands Area, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Wyoming) continue receiving services.
- States will not be transitioned to ESS until the ESS Team identified to provide the service is functional and trained - timing of State transition to service is dependent on the respective ESS Team being established and functional.
- Each State will have an ESS transition plan that identifies roles and responsibilities, workload, current contracts and agreements used to acquire easements, and training needs to ensure State needs are met.
- Under current and anticipated hiring and budget constraints, the target timeline for providing ESS to all States is fiscal year 2020. Targets and schedules will be updated and communicated as circumstances change.

